

## Alice #4

I am a victim of domestic violence.

A number of years ago, I was studying my first year of a social work degree. I was also a single mum to a toddler.

I was out one weekend with my friends and there I met the future perpetrator of the violence inflicted on me, at a local cafe. We ate 'junk' food and a group of us chatted for hours and watched the sun come up. He told me he was a refugee from Eastern Europe and I instantly felt drawn to him. Maybe because of my studies, I felt some relationship to individuals from disadvantaged communities. Whatever the case, we connected, and I think he saw a vulnerability in me.

Our relationship lasted several months before he bought a house for me to move into - with cheap rent for me and my child. As a uni student, in love, and I thought this was too good to be true. I moved in, but the arrangement was that I was to pay a bond, sign a lease and grow 'special herbs' in the back shed (in which we would go halves on the income). He made a secret room between the rumpus room and the shed, it had a secret door which no one could ever find so if the police ever came it would have been hard for them to find. It was highly sophisticated with fans, so if we had parties in the rumpus room there was no smell or noise.

I thought I was in love and the extra money was appealing, but I would soon find out it came at a price. He assaulted me many times in that house. In this story I will detail only a few. On two occasions I legitimately thought I was going to die and I constantly lived in fear.

While I was living there he arranged to have the floorboards revarnished. To do this meant moving all the furniture out of the house into the back rumpus room for a week or so. It was the middle of summer and very hot. When we finally could move things back into the house we had an argument. He pulled me by my hair and threw me into the fridge alcove and pushed the fridge on top of me again and again. He slammed me between the wall and the fridge so many times I thought "this is how I am going to die".

Another night he punched me in the side of the head so hard I was dizzy and feel unconscious for some time. He also ripped out so much hair from my head that I thought I was bald. I saved it so I could show him what he had done the next day and when I did, he laughed.

I had him removed from the house on a number of occasions by the police but he was officially, on paper, my landlord and so had the right to have a key which meant he continued to come and go as he pleased. One night I had a friend over. My 'landlord' walked in with his key, walked out the back, grabbed my friends packet of smokes and helped himself. He was constantly intimidating me and forever present in my life.

He would threaten to call the police to report me in for growing dope if I disobeyed him - even though he was an electrician and had set the whole thing up. He had me over a barrel. He could have denied our whole relationship as on paper we were landlord and tenant. In hindsight his fingerprints were all over the grow room but at the time I was scared. I was a single mum, uni student, desperately broke and vulnerable.

One night I went out for a smoke and closed the sliding door behind me. He threw a crown lager bottle at me through the glass door, it just missed my head and the glass shattered all over me. He then proceeded to smash anything glass in the house on the back veranda, glass, ash trays, empty bottles, whatever he could find. The neighbours woke but never did a thing. They were scared of him too. At the time his apprentice, was staying at our house and he came home during his smoko (break) to help me sweep up all the glass. He told me how awful he felt for me, but at the end of the day it was his boss, so what could he do!

I had no way out and especially no financial way out, so I had to plan my escape. I couldn't even go to a counsellor for help to get out as I knew they would call the police because of all the drugs in the house. I had to plan it carefully. I planned to leave straight after the last crop was done and I had some money to help me get out.

This is a snapshot of what happened over 3 years and I endured this virtually every day. My final year of uni was when I left. I had to ask my lecturers (one of who knew what was happening) for extensions on work. I was also doing my final year practical in a domestic violence service while I was in a high risk domestic violence situation and I hid it well because I had to. I had to get through uni to get out. If I failed my last semester it would have meant another 6mths and possibly death. He absolutely would have killed me. I have no doubt in my mind.

I got out with the help of some family and friends. I graduated uni that year out of pure necessity and have worked in the domestic violence sector for the past 10 years and never shared this story with any colleagues or clients. I have helped set up and now work for a charity that will hopefully change the lives of women who are now in the situation I have been in.

I want my story to be shared because, my point is, domestic violence can happen to anyone, and anyone can hide what they are going through. I was a high risk victim and the professional people I worked closest to in the field never knew. I hid it well which is what victims do!

You never know and don't ever assume what people are going through or haven't been through. I need to add to this story that this was over 10 years ago and I am now a more than happily married woman with another child and life is amazing. I just felt it was time for me to share my experience.